

Building a comprehensive support system for Cooperative Extension volunteer water quality monitoring efforts

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Art Gold is a Professor of Watershed Science at the University of Rhode Island. His research interests focus on sources and sinks of nitrate in coastal watersheds, with a particular interest on riparian nitrogen dynamics. In addition to teaching and research, he directs the water quality extension program at the University of Rhode Island that includes volunteer water quality monitoring, residential pollution prevention, alternative and innovative septic systems and GIS techniques for watershed management. He also coordinates the New England Regional Water Quality Extension Program.

Linda Green is the Program Director for the University of Rhode Island Watershed Watch Program. She serves as the sole representative of the volunteer monitoring community on the 35-member National Water Quality Monitoring Council. Linda is the Volunteer Monitoring Committee co-chair of the North American Lake Management Society. She is a founding member of the Rhode Island Volunteer Monitoring Advisory Board.

Elizabeth Herron is the Program Coordinator for the University of Rhode Island Watershed Watch Program. This science-based volunteer water quality monitoring program generates virtually all of the RI lake water quality monitoring data and is the steppingstone for URI Cooperative Extension water quality education programs. Elizabeth also serves on the Board of Directors for the North American Lakes Management Society.

Robin Shepard is Land and Water Educational Programs Coordinator for the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension and Assistant Professor in the Department of Life Sciences Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research interests include multi-agency partnerships to strengthen conservation education and evaluation of water resource nutrient management and non point source pollution education programs. He oversees the multi-agency Basin Education program, a unique basin-orientated partnership approach to management and outreach in the state of Wisconsin.

Kris Stepenuck is Coordinator for the Water Action Volunteers Program, a citizen stream monitoring and action-oriented water education program for Wisconsin citizens. She works cooperatively with all other authors of this poster to build a comprehensive support system for Cooperative Extension water quality monitoring efforts.

Cooperative Extension (CE) plays a unique role in extending University resources and knowledge to local communities and can play a valuable role in water quality education. Volunteer water quality monitoring is a focus of Extension water quality education programs in a number of locations. These monitoring efforts can lead to increased awareness of local water quality issues and to implementation of locally-driven water quality improvement projects. Coordinated communication and sharing among existing and planned volunteer water quality monitoring efforts can benefit all programs.

With this in mind, the Universities of Wisconsin and Rhode Island were awarded a National Facilitation Grant from the Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service with the purpose of building a comprehensive support system for CE volunteer water quality monitoring efforts across the nation. Objectives of the project include identifying current CE volunteer water quality monitoring programs, developing training materials to support and strengthen these efforts, and working to increase collaboration and cooperation between CE and other agencies.

Results of a series of inquiries sent to State Extension Water Quality Coordinators and coordinators of volunteer water quality monitoring programs indicate there are 30 volunteer water quality monitoring programs that are

sponsored or co-sponsored by CE in 23 US states or territories. Extension is also involved with volunteer water quality monitoring programs that are sponsored by other agencies in 14 states or territories.

These Extension-sponsored programs were initiated between 1978 and 2001. Of 18 programs responding to a March 2002 inquiry, half began after 1995; the oldest program began in 1978. Highest numbers of volunteers are monitoring rivers/streams, followed by lakes/ponds, estuary/marine environments, wells, and wetlands.

A Guide to Growing Extension Monitoring Programs will be developed by utilizing information about these programs' development, training and quality assurance procedures, and volunteer support and outreach techniques.